

Early Literacy: An Introduction

Early literacy skills are what a child needs to know *before* he/she learns to read and write.

The goals of early literacy are to increase the frequency and intention with which parents and caregivers:

- Talk to their children
- Share books with their children
- Bring their children to the library

The six pre-reading/early literacy skills are:

- Print Motivation – thinking books and reading are fun
- Print Awareness – knowing how print and books work
- Phonological Awareness – hearing and playing with the smaller parts of words
- Letter Knowledge – knowing the names and sounds of letters
- Narrative Skills – telling stories and being able to describe events
- Vocabulary – knowing the names of things

This early literacy program:

- is research-based and full of proven methods identified by top literacy experts in the nation.
- is full of big words that describe concepts which most children's librarians are already using.
- is a change in the way we think about ourselves and our profession.
- is not about turning storytime into preschool.
- is **not** about teaching children to read.
- is not about teaching children to read early.
- should not be more work for librarians (the same work with proof and reasons behind why it works).

Early literacy is important because:

- 35% of children enter kindergarten without the necessary skills to be successful students (*Ready to Learn*, a 1991 Carnegie Foundation report).
- there is a 90% probability that a child who struggles with reading in kindergarten will struggle with reading in fourth grade.
- the *Nation's Report Card* (2005) states that 36% of fourth graders and 27% of eighth graders are reading below basic skill level.

Early literacy and libraries go hand in hand because:

- no one organization is responsible for teaching these skills to parents of 0 – 5 year olds.
- there is research-based proof of the value of storytimes and other children's services.
- it increases circulation by increasing awareness of library materials.
- it increases the value of libraries and librarians to the community.
- it ensures creation of future library users.